African nationalism has experienced hard going in recent scholarship. Some scholars regard it as an alien, even cancerous presence. Working from a position not far different from Benedict Anderson’s depiction of the nation as an ‘imagined community,’ Basil Davidson has described nationalism as a Western import which prevented Africans from adapting their precolonial heritage of political institutions and ideas to postcolonial conditions. Similarly, Mahmood Mamdani has argued that the nation remains alien to the rural masses who are denied the rights of nationality. Yet, anyone who in October 1999 joined the crowds along the streets of the Tanzanian capital Dar es Salaam or in its National Stadium, as the body of the first President, ‘Mwalimu’ J.K. Nyerere, was borne through the city to be laid in state, would have difficulty denying that, while the nation may be ‘imagined’, it is a fundamental reality. Throughout those days, grieving millions could be heard debating the meaning of their nationality.

One year later, the run-up to the second multiparty election in Tanzania, and especially its aftermath, gave ammunition to those who portray African nationalism as a hollow shell. The emphasis of the ruling party, Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM), on peace and unity in the country was used quite explicitly to delegitimize critiques of the government’s policies and the state of the economy. Issues including the effects of IMF-imposed economic liberalization, the treatment of Muslims, corruption, and the Union between the Mainland and Zanzibar all became subsumed by CCM’s rhetoric about peace and unity. While CCM’s rhetoric seemed to have the effect of limiting support for the opposition in some regions of the mainland, on the islands of Zanzibar and especially Pemba continuing tensions over the elections resulted in violent clashes by February 2001.

The double-sided nature of nationalism reflected in these two events – its capacity to inspire expressions of unity on the one hand, and its tendency to narrow political debate on the other – is a manifestation of the
history explored in the essays in this book. The narrative of the nation of Tanzania, which was created by the anti-colonist nationalist movement, expanded by the Union after the Zanzibar Revolution, and fused with the ideology of Ujamaa by Julius Nyerere, has shaped Tanzanian political discourse for decades, but has not obliterated the great wealth of political discourses and identities which exist within the nation. Some of these identities and discourses have grown out of forms that pre-dated colonial conquest, but were transformed by colonialism, particularly the British policy of Indirect Rule. Others were created by the spread of Christianity and the rise of wage labor and the expansion of urban areas during the colonial period. Many of them, including Muslim religious organizations and networks in particular, have not been recognized as legitimate forms of political expression by either the colonial or postcolonial state.

The essays in this volume re-examine the links between politics, culture and knowledge in Tanzania from the nineteenth century up to the present. They place the narrative of nation in a longer history of political authority, control of knowledge, and political dissidence. They suggest that, rather than emerging out of a gradual enlargement of scale of political activity, as an early form of nationalist historiography once had it, the nation formed through contest and debate over state power. Yet, while the nation and national state have never been as hegemonic or as totalizing as both critics and supporters sometimes suggest, they have provided a new context in which older discourses about power and knowledge are transformed and given renewed expression. In this way the nation has become a fundamental part of the lived experience of all Tanzanians, whether they reside in the nation’s cities or in its countryside. Much recent scholarly writing on Africa implicitly posits a division between state and community. Authors such as Mamdani, Scott, and Herbst portray states, failed or otherwise, as alien and alienating for the communities over which they rule. In particular, Mamdani argues that, because the postcolonial state draws its legitimacy primarily from urban society and modernity, its rural people remain more subordinated subjects rather than citizens endowed with democratic rights. Yet, in much of Africa, including Tanzania, both urban and rural people possess institutions of modernity — schools, churches, mosques, NGOs, political parties — which provide a multiplicity of networks and a variety of ways of exerting influence on politicians and bureaucrats. While people in both city and countryside may feel alienated from their nation, it remains the frame that encompasses and links the domains of family, locality, and ethnicity with the broader world.

**Historicizing Nationalism: an Argument**

The double-sided nature of Tanzania’s recent experience with nationalism suggests to us that it badly needs to be historicized as both product and cause of historical change. Perhaps the first step in doing so is to explore the relationship between nationalism and the forms of authority and knowledge which pre-dated it, resisted it, and co-existed with it. This is the
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step taken by the contributions in this volume. Although they address a wide variety of themes and situate themselves in an equally wide variety of localities within Tanzania, they coalesce into the following argument. Precolonial political authority claimed neither omniscience nor monopoly over knowledge. Instead, it sought legitimacy and social cohesion by synthesizing combinations of knowledge, some of which arose in intensely local circumstances, and others which emerged through interrelationships which extended across wide regions. Colonial conquest, however, introduced a new relationship between authority and knowledge. Now, the state claimed the power to control the production and dissemination of knowledge, to classify it in hierarchies which assigned lesser value to some forms of knowledge, and to use knowledge to count, regulate and otherwise administer its population. The colonial state largely denied Africans access to many forms of modern knowledge, leaving them only local bodies of knowledge, which it classified as inferior. Consigned in this way to local spheres of action, however, Africans dissented and questioned authority in a great variety of ways. The resulting crisis of legitimacy forced the state, reluctantly and with much foot-dragging, to begin granting Africans the political liberties which would allow state authority to generate legitimacy and compliance through modern forms of liberal governance. This is a project which, though begun during the last decade of colonial rule, was largely conducted by the postcolonial nationalist state. It was a project, moreover, which placed sharp limits on freedom, particularly by sanctioning political expression only in narrow discursive social fields. Yet, under the postcolonial state dissidents have continuously struggled to efface the boundaries which distinguish legitimate and illegitimate political expression. Let us now look more closely at how the essays in this volume merge into this argument.

Part I of this volume contains two essays about precolonial political authority. Both of them are situated in the portion of Tanzania where documentary sources about its precolonial history are richest—the northeast. The conclusions drawn in these essays by Steven Feierman on Usambara and by Edward Alpers on Uluguru contribute mightily, however, to our understanding of precolonial political structures throughout eastern Africa. Both show how precolonial authority, while demonstrating stunning creativity in the political use of ritual and ideology, sought legitimacy by synthesizing knowledge drawn from different sources. The fascinating aspect of the rituals which followed the death of a Shambaa king and identified his successor, argues Feierman, is that no one could claim possession of all the knowledge needed to complete them. Knowledge about them was divided among numerous individuals and groups, whose co-operation was required if the rituals of royal death and succession were to maintain the continuity of royal authority. Where Feierman stresses creativity in organizing ritual, Alpers emphasizes innovativeness in the political career of the Luguru chief, Kingalu mwana Shaha. The Kingalu, who ruled from the 1850s through to the early 1870s, drew his legitimacy partly from highly localized sources—clan identities and the power of rainmaking. Yet, the surprising twist in Alpers’
story is that this Luguru chief was born on the Swahili coast, and derived much of his authority from coastal and Muslim identity as well as coastal connections. These connections, together with his innovativeness in the political use of ritual, tradition and religion, allowed the Kingalu to maintain power in a period when the expansion of trade from Zanzibar was transforming the political landscape of the coastal hinterland.

One reason why resistance to authority, the central theme of the essays in Part II, was such a pervasive aspect of the colonial period is surely because colonial rule discouraged the extraordinary creativity and innovativeness found in these examples from Usambara and Uluguru. Perhaps in a different time and place, a colonizing power might have appreciated political traditions capable of fostering social cohesion and assimilating a great variety of social and religious influences. The forms of authority described by Feierman and Alpers could not easily co-exist, however, with the modernist ambitions of Tanzania's colonial rulers. Like modern states, precolonial rulers depended on knowledge. Yet, because political knowledge was both dispersed and localized, rulers could manipulate it well only by combining competence in intensely local affairs and conditions with participation in social networks which were regional in scope.

By contrast, colonial government claimed near omniscience in the production, preservation and deployment of knowledge. Beginning with the precise demarcation of a field for social intervention through the creation of territorial boundaries, as the essay by Ralph Austen shows, the colonial state claimed the right and obligation to count and classify its population, to define what constituted social improvement, and to intervene in social affairs in order to achieve it. These pretensions demanded hierarchies of authority and knowledge. Colonial hierarchies relentlessly subordinated local knowledge to the rationality of Western knowledge, and at the same time tried to confine African political actors to highly localized fields of action. Unlike precolonial political techniques, they did not encourage integration and cohesion, but caused exclusion, subjugation, and ultimately fierce resentment. Yet, subordinated and confined though it may have been, ‘one of the fascinating things about local historical knowledge,’ as Feierman reminds us, ‘is that we have no way of knowing what its political uses will be’. As many of the essays in Part II show, local historical knowledge took on new meaning as the colonized resisted being confined to the local stage – and resisted being told that their knowledge was inferior, irrational, and lacking in universal applicability. This resistance became probably the strongest political impulse of the colonial period. This impulse continued into the postcolonial era, with members of local communities continuing to try to translate and transform knowledge from the past and to write their way into the future.7

Essays by Thomas Spear, Jamie Monson and Gregory Maddox show us that local history provided a crucially important basis for political activity in the period from the mid-1920s through to 1961, when in many areas political life was dominated by chiefs appointed under the British administrative system of Indirect Rule. Although these chapters cover very different regions, the political dynamics discussed within them appear
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strikingly similar. Spear covers one of the most highly developed areas of the colony – Arusha, the northern region of settler farms and coffee-growers. Monson deals with one of the most isolated areas of the territory – the Kilombero Valley in the south. Maddox studies the central province of Dodoma – a region deeply impoverished, yet closely connected with surrounding regions through trade and labor migration.

Spear focuses on the ‘politics of neo-traditionalism’ – the reworking of local political knowledge in the new context of Native Authority chiefship. He shows that, to be successful, chiefs had to be resourceful in combining the ‘patrimonial politics’ of clientship with the bureaucratic politics of the colonial administration. As resentment of European land alienation welled up, however, the Arusha and Meru people combined old ideas of legitimacy and moral economy with new ideas of democracy. Once they found means of putting this combination of ideas into practice within churches and co-operatives, argues Spear, ‘neo-traditional politics could no longer contain the tensions emerging within Arusha society’. Spear is careful to point out, however, that the deeply embedded body of ideas which we call ‘tradition’ was far from inflexible and unchanging. Instead, it was the product of intense debate. Monson and Maddox examine this debate closely. Monson shows that debate about history and ethnic identity in Kilombero became the starting point for opposition to one of the more oppressive chiefly regimes in colonial Tanganyika. It also lit the spark, she shows, that spread nationalism in Kilombero. Maddox describes the very complex political circumstances in which the important Paramount of Ugogo, Mazengo, operated. Mazengo was regarded as highly dangerous, not only by his British superiors, but also by his subjects. In this context, a great variety of narratives developed, some defending Mazengo’s legitimacy and others questioning it, but all trying to explain the source of his frightening, and perhaps malevolent, power.

As Monson points out, the debates which swirled around Native Authority chiefship were situated ‘within the contexts of power established by colonial administration’. Similar direct confrontations with chiefly power occurred throughout Tanganyika. They were fed, however, by deeper, subterranean currents which, though not always visible in the narrow venues where political speech and activity were sanctioned by the colonial state, nevertheless nourished dissidence. In part, those currents were generated by an intense drive, reflected in the life course of many members of the colonial generations, to overcome the state regulations which tried to confine them to localized spheres of political and social action. One of the individuals who was most spectacularly successful in breaking out of these confines is described in the chapter by E.S. Atieno Odhiambo. Odhiambo discusses the life of Mohammed Hussein Bayume, a Nubian from Tanga who lived in Germany from 1919 until his death in a German concentration camp in 1943. Yet, the current of dissidence was fed not only by the ambition for mobility, but also by daily life in the most intimate social contexts.

Two essays on the Southern Highlands conclude this section. Marcia Wright shows how the practice of labor migration shaped concepts of
community and identity not just in the workplaces of Tanga but also in their home districts around Lake Malawi. She argues that the identities thus formed proved capable of mobilization in the name of a broader anti-colonial nationalism while at the same time preserving room for a locally oriented critique. In his essay on Njombe in the Southern Highlands, James Giblin notes that a highly inflexible concept of tribe and family underlay claims to legitimacy by the district’s Native Authority chiefs. While the chiefs pictured themselves as legitimate candidates for chiefly office by virtue of their membership in a rigid hierarchy of patrilineal clans, daily family living encouraged a perception of family as the product of continuous social negotiation and individual effort. Thus chiefly legitimacy was continually undermined, argues Giblin, by the experience of daily life, making the chiefs easy targets once the nationalist movement arose in the Southern Highlands in the late 1950s.

These studies show that, while colonial authority tried to confine Tanganyikans to highly localized spheres of political and economic action, it proved wholly ineffective in drawing legitimacy from local knowledge, political cultures and social relationships. Instead, many kinds of knowledge and many aspects of culture became sources of dissidence. Surely it was the colonial state’s lack of legitimacy and its inability to control knowledge and culture which led it, in exceedingly cautious fashion, to expand political liberties during its last decade. Thus the chapters on local political life in the colonial period lead us to argue that the problem faced by the colonial state is that it possessed neither the means to rule through coercion (a point made vividly by John Iliffe’s contribution to this volume), nor the means to exercise modern, liberal governance.

The anthropologist David Scott has recently written in very stimulating fashion about the difficulties faced by colonial states that wish to make this transition to modern governance. Drawing heavily on Michel Foucault, Scott argues that modern liberal states exercise control most effectively not through direct physical coercion, but through conceptions of authority, rights and responsibility which ‘shape and govern the capacities, competencies, and wills of the governed’. Once such conceptions are ‘inscribed into the cognitive-institutional terrain of social and political life,’ continues Scott, ‘power seeks to operate through the shaping of conduct rather than the shaping of bodies’. Above all, he contends, modern governance seeks to ‘promote a rational and responsible self-conduct’. This modern style of self-conduct, he suggests, limits the social and discursive spheres in which citizens may exercise their political rights. Modern liberal states demand that their citizens confine political activity to very limited public spheres of political action and discourse. Participation in these spheres requires competence in particular forms of discourse. Once modern liberal governance became established, Scott argues, participation by competent actors in state-sanctioned political venues ‘would be the only rational and legal way of exercising influence in what now counted as politics’. In short, he argues, the ‘political problem’ of states such as colonial Tanganyika was ‘not merely to contain resistance and encourage accommodation but to seek to ensure that both could only be defined in relation to the categories
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and structures of modern political rationalities*. If we accept that the colonial state failed to instill modern political rationalities that would ‘contain resistance and encourage accommodation’ to itself, then the question remains whether nationalist ideology and the postcolonial state have been more successful.9

One aspect of creating modern political rationalities was identifying the areas of social life which would be controlled through liberal governance. An area that seems clearly to have been defined as an object of governance in the 1950s was the complex area that came to be regarded as race relations. The growing significance of race as a matter for government regulation is one of numerous fascinating points which emerge from John Iiliffe’s rich chapter. As Iiliffe shows, safeguarding the rights of minority races through the policy of multi-racialism was an important source of British reluctance to relinquish power to TANU. Of course, Nyerere and TANU ultimately made a more effective appeal to liberal sensibilities than did the British colonial establishment, by arguing that the duty of post-colonial government was to protect the liberties not of racial communities, but of individuals. Nevertheless, once drawn into the discourse of race by its struggle against British multi-racialism, Tanzanian nationalism could not thereafter escape the fact that maintaining equity in matters defined as race relations would remain both a prime concern of government and a measure of effectiveness in governance.

Several chapters which, together with the essay by Iiliffe, make up Part III of this volume suggest that the discourse of race obscured the subtleties of political change during the transition from colonial to postcolonial government. Both of our chapters on Zanzibar provide examples of great political and ideological complexity during the 1950s and 1960s. Lawrence Mbogoni’s account of a sedition trial in 1954 shows that, among critics of British rule in Zanzibar, identities were shaped by an unstable mixture of ethnicity, language, political ideology and religion. Mbogoni asks us to consider whether, rather than containing racial tension, British tactics may have hastened the polarization of Zanzibar’s population around racial identities. Thomas Burgess finds that similar complexity continued to shape radical politics in Zanzibar up to the Revolution of 1964. He argues that, by attributing the tensions that built up in the late 1950s and early 1960s merely to racial antagonisms, historians neglect a variety of factors. These include not only class and religion, but also generational identities, particularly that of the ‘youth’, and the desire to find access to patronage which animated some political activity among the young. Yet, in spite of these complexities of identity, ideology and political outlook on the ground, the first years of independence witnessed, as James Brennan puts it, an inexorable ‘constricting [of the] the meager, late-colonial civil liberties that formed the boundaries of Tanganyika’s discursive public sphere’. Brennan’s chapter studies two small political parties that opposed TANU after independence, the African National Congress and the All-Muslim National Union of Tanganyika. He shows that, while a wide variety of concerns and interests, including Islam and generational conflict between senior men and young men, brought opponents of TANU into
these parties, they trapped themselves within the narrow discursive fields created by the political rationalities which emerged in the last years of colonial rule. The ANC was trapped in talk about race. As Brennan says, it ‘phrased … multi-dimensional grievances in monochromatic racial terms’. Similarly, ANMUT found that the postcolonial state would simply not allow political organizing and political speech based on religious identity.

Brennan’s argument – that national identity brought a narrowing of space for political talk and discourse – appears to leave a bleak prospect for the future. Yet grounds for optimism remain. The late Susan Geiger suggests that nationalism restored the dimension of the political culture of precolonial Tanzanian societies that the essays of Feierman and Alpers revealed. This was the way in which precolonial political cultures were made by combinations of knowledge, some produced locally and others obtained through mobility and widely dispersed social networks. Nationalism, she points out, appealed to men and ‘women who already lived in multi-ethnic communities and participated in trans-tribal social and economic organizations’. She suggests that nationalism has released the currents of dissidence that remained hidden and subterranean under colonial rule. ‘In the tradition of subverting colonial control,’ she writes, Tanzanian men and women, ‘seek in various ways, including cultural, to resist the authoritarian state.’ Only the future can tell us whether Geiger’s optimism is warranted. In the essays which conclude this volume, however, Y. Q. Lawi and Kelly Askew teach us a great deal about the practices and discourses which will determine whether the limits of postcolonial freedom will be determined more by currents of dissidence or by state power. Lawi demonstrates the effort made by the postcolonial state to transform the teaching of history into part of the nation-building process. The result, Lawi argues, has been the alienation of local communities from the process of formal historical production, as ‘school history’ has little relevance for people’s lives. Likewise, while discussing musical culture in the 1990s, Askew examines tensions between local performing artists and the agencies of state which attempt to control culture and use it for pedagogical purposes. She leaves us with a very useful way of thinking about the relationship between nationalism, state authority and political dissidence.

The juxtaposition of Geiger’s work with Askew’s and Lawi’s demonstrates a fundamental paradox at the core of the essays in this volume: the way in which nationalism in Tanzania both liberates and represses. While this argument can easily be compressed into a descending narrative emphasizing the betrayal of the emancipatory promise of both nationalism and Ujamaa, the history of nationalism in Tanganyika and Tanzania deserves more historicized treatment and the tension remains palatable today. A variety of factors, including the possibility of tribal and nationalist history being combined, the collapse of Indirect Rule legitimacies, the pervasive influence of a Swahili identity, and others outlined in the essays collected here combined to defeat British attempts to promote a tribal alternative to nationalism by the 1950s, leaving the then governor of
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Tanganyika to write to his counterpart in Uganda, John Iliffe reports, that he is ‘in the happy position of having a number of dissident groups but here every African is a nationalist’. Yet nationalism was more than a temporary alliance. In a passage influenced by Geiger’s work, Alexander, McGregor and Ranger argue that people in Matabeleland in Zimbabwe ‘feel that the nationalist goals they fought and suffered for were not only valuable in themselves, but remain one of the principal means through which they can hold the state to account’. They note, by way of comparison, that TANU mobilized a diverse alliance of groups across the regions of Tanganyika in a way that was not possible in ‘more developed’ Rhodesia or more unevenly developed Mozambique. As Brennan’s essay notes, there remained little political or rhetorical space for opposition.

Yet Askew’s and Lawi’s chapters point out the reality of state power which people seek to use both nationalism and locally distinctive bodies of knowledge to resist. Appadurai, in an imaginative essay of local identity, has argued that the nation state:

… works by policing its borders, producing its ‘people’ …, constructing its citizens, defining its capitals, monuments, cities, waters and soils, and by constructing its locales of memory and commemoration, such as graveyards and cenotaphs, mausoleums and museums. The nation-state conducts on its territories the bizarrely contradictory project of creating a flat, contiguous and homogeneous space of nationness and simultaneously a set of places and spaces (prisons, barracks, airports, radio-stations, secretariats, parks, marching grounds, processional routes) calculated to create the internal distinctions and divisions necessary for state ceremony, surveillance, discipline and mobilization. These latter are also the spaces and places that create and perpetuate the distinctions between rulers and ruled, criminals and officials, crowds and leaders, actors and observers.

While demonstrating some of the ways that the state attempts to control cultural expression, Askew reminds us that, in order to use cultural expression for its own purposes, the state must depend on the creativity and performative ability of artists. In this way she brings us back to a point which runs through all of the contributions in this volume: no matter how energetic political authority may be in imposing its rationalities, people, and not just those the state would label as dissidents, continue to create alternative means, licit and illicit, for critiquing and contesting power.

Conclusion: historians, local histories, and the nation

In June 2001, the Historical Association of Tanzania (HAT) held a conference which, in very unusual fashion, brought academic historians and other scholars from within and outside Tanzania together with Tanzanian secondary school teachers. One of the purposes of the conference was to celebrate – or was it to mourn? – the retirement of the Association's
long-serving president, Professor Isaria N. Kimambo, from the Department of History at the University of Dar es Salaam. At the conclusion of the conference, Professor Kimambo received a festschrift consisting of preliminary drafts of the chapters in this book. Professor Kimambo helped to found HAT in the 1960s during the first flowering of Africanist historiography that sought to restore agency to Africans in history. It has endured through several twists and turns in the development of historical study in and about Tanzania. It witnessed the nationalist-influenced concentration on resistance to colonialism, a turn towards Marxist-influenced political economy, and a focus by historians in the 1980s and 1990s on social and environmental change. HAT has also linked scholars at the University of Dar es Salaam with teachers, curriculum developers, and non-professional historians through its publications and periodic conferences. By serving as one of the most important interfaces between the guild historians of the University and the educational professionals of the country, it has played its part in building the Tanzanian nation.

During the conference, one of the secondary school teachers, frustrated with a national curriculum which some might characterize as arcane, as well as with the lack of teaching materials, demanded relevance. ‘What,’ she demanded, ‘can we teach children about history that will help them survive in Tanzania today?’ We do not know if any work of scholarly history can answer that question, and the essays in this collection will not try to answer it explicitly. Instead, the question serves as the text for this collection. The question, of course, interrogates not just the historiography of Tanzania but of Africa, and the discipline itself. Bound up in the teacher’s question, and the context of its asking, lies one history of Tanzania, as well as the discontents with that history. The question plays off the hegemonic nature of official nationalist history created as Tanzania was created and in some ways pioneered for all Africa at the University of Dar es Salaam. It implicitly draws on the debates at the conference over the validity and importance of local historical knowledge in the face of perceived dramatic change brought about by modernity and globalization. It shifts across the discursive fields generated by colonialism, anti-colonial nationalism, and local resistance to the hegemonic tendencies of that nationalism.

Many of the academic presenters suggested that one way to give history immediacy for students would be to frame it around change in the intimate spheres of everyday life in family and community. Their strategy of studying the relationship between the local and the national, in order to reveal the significance of local historical change for the nation as a whole, took the conference back to what, as Steven Feierman reminds us in his essay, remains a central aspect of Professor Kimambo’s scholarship. His work has been marked by a concern with both local and broader arenas; indeed, his long-time fascination with markets in precolonial society betrays a powerful interest in the concrete social institutions that connect localities with wider regions. Professor Kimambo’s first book concentrated on highly localized political traditions, but did so in order to make a point of broad significance about them. His second book presented a history of
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interaction between local communities and the wider regional and international forces that beset them. Yet, he has remained intensely concerned with the problems of building a national polity and a viable national economy. Throughout his career, he has labored to ensure that both the Department of History at UDSM as well as HAT would teach the citizens of Tanzania about the problems of building a cohesive and even prosperous nation. At both an intellectual and institutional level, Professor Kimambo has been at the center of the production of historical knowledge about and from Tanzania. He has remained committed to his profession, his institution and his nation despite at times tremendous hardship. In this volume we see some of the fruits of his labor and at the same time the degree of the struggle that remains. Yet, his steadfastness alone is cause enough to remain optimistic about his project and his country.

Notes

4. Tanzania had been a one-party state from the mid-1960s until 1992.
9. Research that would answer this question is only just beginning. The dissertations currently being written by James Brennan, Ned Bertz and Andrew Ivaska should go far towards addressing this problem.
11. Ibid., p. 84.
13. I. N. Kimambo, Three Decades of Historical Research at Dar es Salaam (Dar es Salaam:
